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Total membership:

443 on June 15

Life members: 159

July Program

“Maine’s German POW Camps in World War II”

From 1944 to 1946, more than 4,000 German prisoners of war called Maine home. The story of how they arrived and the lasting impact that they had on the people who encountered them is one of Maine’s most interesting and obscure stories. Using materials and research used to create the 2012 exhibit “Maine Boys Overseas and German Boys in Maine,” Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine Program Director David Greenham shares the lively and surprising story of an interesting chapter of Maine history. It is a story of cooperation, kindness, and enemies who became colleagues, and even friends. Mr. Greenham continues to research the project with the goal of writing a book about the topic in partnership with several historians

Mr. Greenham is an adjunct professor of drama at the University of Maine at Augusta. He works as a grant writer and program manager for the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine. He spent 14 years as the producing artistic director of the Theater At Monmouth and has been a theater artist and arts administrator for more than 25 years. In 2013, David was the creator and performer of “Maine at Work,” a touring program commissioned by the Maine Humanities Council. He has also been seen as a performer with Everyman Repertory Theater, the Bath Shakespeare Festival, the Camden Shakespeare Festival, and Capitol City Improv in Augusta.

This Kennebec Historical Society public presentation will take place on Wednesday, July 20, 2016, at 6:30 p.m. at the Michael Klahr Center at the University of Maine at Augusta, at 46 University Drive in Augusta.



President's Message

I wish to thank Anne Cough, Emily Schroeder, Kathy Kirkham, Bruce Kirkham, Phyllis vonHerrlich, and Enga Stewart for hosting a wonderful 125th birthday party for the society.

I also wish to thank Stefanie Barley for greeting visitors as they entered the Fuller House.

The harpist, Deb Sandler, provided the proper atmosphere for the occasion. The guests appeared to enjoy the gathering and those who didn't come missed a good time.

The celebration will continue in August with a movie and popcorn night featuring Holman Day and at the annual meeting in September.

— *Kent London*



Members and guests enjoy the celebration on May 7 at the Fuller House.

A Movie and Popcorn, With a Focus on Augusta

On August 9, come to a special screening of "All But Forgotten," a documentary film about Holman Day's moviemaking in Augusta. Holman Day was a newspaperman and writer who was born in and grew up in Vassalboro. He graduated from Colby College in Waterville and spent the first part of his career as a newspaper reporter, writer, editor, and then newspaper owner. In the early 20th century, he wrote poetry, novels, and short stories, many of which were based on his observations of people in Maine. He even spent time visiting lumber camps and river drives in interior Maine to observe firsthand what it was like. In 1920 and 1921 Day ventured into the moviemaking business when he was invited to join Edgar Jones Productions, a moviemaking company based in Augusta. The company had been using Day's writings as the basis for its movie scripts and thought it would be good to have Day as part of the company. According to Day's biography, he was not pleased with the way his works were being interpreted so he engineered a takeover, and the company became Holman Day Productions. The documentary we will see is primarily about the movies Day made along the Kennebec in 1921 and features excerpts from some of the films. Movie house popcorn will be available for sale. Please join us at Augusta City Center at 6:30 p.m. on August 9 for this special program.

The Kennebec Historical Society Welcomes the Following New Members

Alexander P. Hastings – New York, New York
Leonard Moreau – Litchfield

Gary Mann – East Winthrop
Stephanie Mulliken – Las Vegas, Nevada

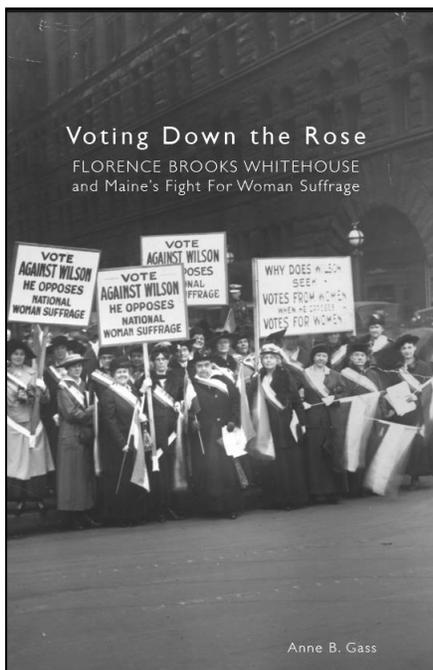
and continues to recognize our
Sustaining Business Member
Kennebec Savings Bank, Augusta
and our
Sponsoring Business Member
Pine State Trading Company, Gardiner

August Program “Florence Brooks Whitehouse and Maine’s Fight for Woman Suffrage”

Florence Brooks Whitehouse was a Maine suffrage leader from 1914 to 1920. Her support of “radical” tactics, such as picketing President Woodrow Wilson, earned condemnation from her more conservative suffrage peers in Maine. As a result, she was left out of suffrage histories, although the record plainly shows that she did more than almost anyone in the closing years of the campaign to bring women’s suffrage to the state. Through a statewide suffrage referendum, World War I, the 1918 influenza pandemic, and the political machinations of men of both major political parties, Florence and her peers fought for women’s right to vote and to have equality of opportunity with men.

Anne Gass, our August speaker and great-granddaughter of Whitehouse, has written *Voting Down the Rose: Florence Brooks Whitehouse and Maine’s Fight for Woman Suffrage*, which is an account of Florence’s suffrage activities during the critical final years of the campaign. Because of the wealth of correspondence, interviews, and other historical documents Gass found in her research, Whitehouse is often able to speak for herself in the pages. William Barry, who reviewed the book for the Portland Press Herald, wrote “The author, Whitehouse’s great-granddaughter, is never sentimental, for this is a true work of scholarship. Gass depicts not only the work of one Maine suffragist, but also the clash between the Maine Woman Suffrage Association, founded in 1874, and the radical National Woman’s Party of 1916.”

The Kennebec Historical Society public presentation will take place on Wednesday, August 17, at 6:30 p.m. at Augusta City Center, located at 16 Cony Street in Augusta.



June Book Sale a Success

The spring book sale held June 11 at the society's headquarters on Winthrop Street raised over \$500. Thanks go to the society members who donated the books, the buyers who came from as far away as Skowhegan, and the book sale crew: Richard Bridges, Sally Joy, Bruce Kirkham, Kathy Kirkham, Heide Munroe, Rod Spearin, Phil Tiemann, and Mary Ann Tiemann. The next sale will be held when we have accumulated enough books.

125th Birthday Celebration

On Saturday, May 7, about 40 members of the public and city and county officials joined members of the Kennebec Historical Society in celebrating the 125th birthday of the organization at the society headquarters on Winthrop Street. They all enjoyed a piece of birthday cake and heard music played by Deb Sandler on her Celtic harp. A PowerPoint program traced the history of the society, and a collection of photos in the display case chronicled the society's travels in its 116-year search for a permanent home. At 2:30 Patsy Crockett, a Kennebec County commissioner, presented President Kent London with a proclamation from the commissioners proclaiming May 7 as Kennebec Historical Society Day.

Phyllis vonHerrlich assembled a display which she installed in the Augusta City Center second floor showcase celebrating the society's history and its mission to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Kennebec County. Other volunteers who contributed to the success of the celebration are Stefanie Barley, Richard Bridges, Annie Cough, Kathy Kirkham, Bruce Kirkham, Kent London, Emily Schroeder, and Enga Stewart.



Patsy Crockett, a Kennebec County commissioner, presents the society's president, Kent London, with a proclamation from the commissioners proclaiming May 7 as Kennebec Historical Society Day.

The reading room is open Wednesday thru Friday from 10 a.m. through 2 p.m. for the rest of the summer.

We would love to keep it open year-round, but we lack the volunteers necessary to do that. We think we have an idea how we can find more: We're thinking about starting a Reading Room assistant training program. This will provide several volunteers with information on how to guide researchers to common historical and genealogical resources and how to work with an assistant archivist on more complex tasks.

In order to bridge periods when researchers are not present, we will be developing meaningful projects for this group to work on.

We will be developing plans over the next couple of months. If you are interested or have some thoughts on this approach, let Ernie Plummer, Bruce Kirkham, or Phyllis vonHerrlich know. We plan to report more details in the next newsletter.

The Collections Box

In several past columns, I have cited the names of persons associated with recent acquisitions. As a result, some readers have told me that they have been able to find family-related photos, manuscripts or letters. I think that this is a good time to do it again.

We have recently acquired photos in various formats of Henry Willer, of Fairfield; Phillias Turgeon, of Waterville; Emma Simons and her family, possibly of Waterville; Ellen Melissa (Gullifer) Sotherd, of Waterville; Reginald O. Bulger, of Waterville; William Brown, of West Gardiner; Augusta M. Pierce, of Gardiner; and Mrs. Ralph Sherman, of Clinton.

During the same time period we have acquired the following correspondence: Samuel P. Benson in Winthrop to Virgil D. Paris in Portland, August 18, 1845; Fred Riley, of Boston, to Thomas W. Smith, of Augusta, November 30, 1832; John Billings in Boston to G. W. Morton in Augusta, March 21, 1846; Prentiss Mellen in Augusta to Luther Fitch in Westbrook, May 29, 1822; William Bradbury in Hallowell to his father, Dr. James Bradbury, in Parsonsfield, March 5, 1834; Pastor Albert C. White to Dr. W. B. Lapham, William R. Smith, and G. A. Robertson, March 30, 1883; Fuller-Holway Company in Augusta to Whitcomb-Haynes and Company in Ellsworth Falls, December 22, 1915; Emma L. Dudley in Augusta to cousin Miss Eliza A. Gilbert in Wingfield, June 2, 1850; Lizzie Bowley in Lewiston to Charley G. Gleason in Canaan, October 15, 1892 on Maranacook House, Readfield, stationery; E. W. Black, of North Wayne Scythe Company, in East Monmouth to T. S. Fuller, Deer Isle, May 26, 1851; W. Welch in Oakland to Mrs. Wesley Welch in Leeds, May 30, 1897; I. C. Brewer in Boston to G. W. Allen in Augusta, May 18, 1847; William L. Grant in Farmingdale to L. T. Taber in Hempstead, New York, July 31, 1858; Charles Vaughan in Hallowell to L. P. Brown in Dover, November 6, 1844; M.S. Spear in Hallowell to James Blanchard in Augusta, June 12, 1890; Samuel S. Warren and John H. Smith, deputy sheriff, in Palmyra to Samuel S. Warner in Hallowell, July 20, 1826; John Billings in Boston to G. W. Morton in Augusta, March 21, 1846; and D. D. Tilton of Hallowell Manufacturing to Messers R. Whiting Sons, October 1850.

I hope many of you find these lists helpful.

For the Collections Committee
– Bruce Kirkham



Can You Help Us?

This photo of the James Fitzgerald Post No. 2 marching band probably was taken in the late 1930s or early '40s. The band is assembled in what then was called Monument Park (now Memorial Park) in Augusta, with the Governor Hill Mansion in the background. If any of the faces look familiar, please contact the society at 622-7718 or e-mail us at kennhis1891@gmail.com.

Great Sidney Bog

Lying quietly for centuries in the midst of Kennebec County is an ecological gem, unnoticed, largely undisturbed and even unknown to many. The Great Sidney Bog also has a storied history dating to its birth during the ice ages.

The bog straddles north Augusta and the southern mid-section of Sidney, between the Belgrade Lakes chain and Kennebec River (or Route 27 and Bog Road). Through its long history, the bog – now protected from development – has survived a series of threats that include a stint as a military ordnance range, scorching fire, and proposals to build an airport and to scoop out its base of peat, which sustains a wealth of plant and animal life.

Today the bog serves mainly as a recreational draw for snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, hunters, and naturalists and their students.

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry calls it a “raised level bog,” which is situated above the water table and receives its liquid nourishment from runoff and rain. Its ecological importance “is augmented by its location in the southern third of the state, where raised bogs become much scarcer than they are further north.”

The state agency says the 640-acre expanse is a deer wintering area and home to a variety of inland wading birds and waterfowl. The abundant rhodora and sheep laurel blanketing the sphagnum-topped peat base blossom into a vivid, pink-purple floral display in the warm months. Purple and white lady slippers and carnivorous pitcher plants can be found. Larch, pitch pine and black spruce trees dot the flat surface. Studies have shown the bog to be 10 to 20 feet deep.

The Great Sidney Bog is considered one of two major geologic features in the town, in which two-thirds of the bog is located, says the book “History of Sidney, Maine 1792-1992” (Picton Press, Camden, Maine). The other is the Belgrade-Summerhaven Esker Complex, also a remnant of glaciation that occurred between 2 million and 10,000 years ago.

The Sidney bog fills a shallow depression left by the last glacier that once covered the area, says the town history. Water that collected there became stagnant and oxygen-poor. Plants that can live in those conditions, chiefly sphagnum moss, survived. As the water became increasingly acidic, other plants died. What remains is layer after layer of partially decayed material known as peat. A number of plant species have also thrived on the surface of the sphagnum, leaving the rich mix of flora that exists today.

But the bog’s past has not always been so serene and pastoral. According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the bog was used by the Maine Army National Guard for artillery training from 1923 to 1933.

“Munitions approved for use included 75mm artillery shrapnel and high explosive rounds,” the Army said in an informational document mailed to abutting landowners in November 2012 following a site survey to check for unexploded ordnance.

While the recent survey found no munitions debris, the document states that one piece of unexploded ordnance was discovered in the 1930s. As for now, it suggested care if a suspected device is seen. It should not be touched or disturbed, and should be reported to authorities.

Also during the 1930s, a lightning strike caused a major fire in the bog, says the Sidney history. Then, in the 1960s, the bog was one of three sites considered for construction of a regional airport. But the site escaped the project as the Legislature decided not to fund it.

In 1988, two companies were expressing interest in mining peat for use as an energy source from the bog. General Peat Resources of Bangor and Houston, Texas, sought permission to begin soil testing, the Kennebec Journal reported. GCO Minerals, also of Houston and a subsidiary of International Paper, signed 30-year leases with owners of bog land in preparation for extraction.

At the time, the only active peat mining in Maine was being done in Deblois, in Washington County, by General Peat Resources.

In Kennebec County, residents living near the bog expressed their opposition, although there were a few who wanted to keep an open mind on the issue. At one public meeting, General Peat Resources explained that the mining process called for scooping up 20 feet of the peat and drying it. It discussed plans to build a 40-acre power plant where the peat would be burned. Landowners would get \$1 per ton of peat extracted.

(Continued on next page)

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Some landowners who were approached for leases were promised waterfront lots that would result from the mining, the newspaper reported.

Opponents, citing environmental impacts of such a project, began exploring the idea of preserving the bog in a trust or conservation easement. Augusta took steps to designate its 100 acres of the site as a resource protection zone. Today, a city ordinance declares it a resource protection area, which greatly limits residential development and makes commercial development almost impossible. The state Department of Environmental Protection considers the bog a wetland that merits special protection.

Sidney acquired large portions of the bog through a tax lien in 1989, and the town voted to preserve it in its natural state in March 1991. A warrant passed at the town meeting called for maintaining the bog “in its natural state indefinitely unless authorized by citizens at three successive Town Meetings to do otherwise.” The town also created a Bog Stewardship Committee to oversee the town’s portion of the bog and make it available “for recreational and educational purposes that are consistent with its historical use.”

It is unclear whether Native Americans who long ago roamed the area spent much time, if any, on the bog. Historical records that could be searched make no reference to native use of the area, although the Sidney history says several sites showing Native American activity have been documented along the eastern shore of Messalonskee Lake and nearly a dozen along the west bank of the Kennebec River.

More information can be found at:

https://www1.maine.gov/dacf/mnap/focusarea/sidney_bog_focus_area.pdf

– Glenn Adams



“It’s like walking on a water bed’ is how one tour guide described the soft, cushiony action of the sphagnum moss in the Sidney Bog.” Kennebec Journal/Rhett Wieland, June 1987

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(Please send to Kennebec Historical Society, P.O. Box 5582, Augusta, ME 04332-5582.)

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Reading Room hours: Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; other times by appointment

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